NUM. CCLXXXIII.

The SPECTATOR.

——*vocat in Certamina Divos.* Virg.

Saturday, March 22. 1712.

WE are now entering upon the Sixth Book of *Paradise Loſt*, in which the Poet deſcribes the Battel of Angels; having raiſed his Reader's Expectation, and prepared him for it by ſeveral Paſſages in the preceding Books. I omitted theſe Paſſages in my Obſervations on the former Books, having purpoſely reſerved them for the opening of the Subject of which gave occaſion to them. The Poet's Imagination was ſo inflamed with this great Scene of Action, that where-ever he ſpeaks of it, he riſes, if poſſible above himſelf. Thus where he mentions Satan in the beginning of his Poem,

——*Him the Almighty power*
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Skie,
With hideous ruin and combuſtion down
To bottomleſs perdition, there to dwell
In Adamantine Chains and penal fire,
Who dar'ſt defie th' Omnipotent to Arms.

We have likewiſe ſeveral noble Hints of it in the Infernal Converſe.

O Prince, O Chief of many throned Powers
That led th' imbattel'd Seraphim to War,
Too well I ſee and rue the dire event,
That with ſad overthrow and foul defeat
Hath loſt us Heav'n, and all this mighty hoſt
In horrible deſtruction laid thus low.
But ſee the angry victor hath recall'd
His Miniſters of Vengeance and purſuit
Back to the Gates of Heav'n: The Sulphurous hail
Shot after us in Storm, o'erblown hath laid
The fiery Surge, that from the precipice
Of Heav'n receiv'd us falling, and the thunder
Wing'd with red lightning and impetuous rage,
Perhaps hath ſpent his Shafts, and ceaſes now
To follow through the vaſt and boundleſs deep.

There are ſeveral other very Sublime Images on the ſame Subject in the Firſt Book, as alſo in the Second.

What when we fled amain, purſu'd and ſtrook
With Heav'ns affli&ing Thunder, and beſought
The deep to ſhelter us; this Hell then ſeem'd
A refuge from thoſe wounds ——

In ſhort, the Poet never mentions any thing of this Battel but in ſuch Images of Greatneſs and Terrour, as are ſuitable to the Subject. Among ſeveral others, I cannot forbear mentioning that Paſſage where the Power, who is deſcrib'd as ſitting over the Chaos, ſpeaks in the Third Book.

Thus Satan; and him thus the Anarch old
With faultering ſpeech and viſage incompos'd
Anſwer'd. I know thee, ſtranger, who thou art,
That mighty leading Angel, who of late
Made head againſt Heav'ns King, though overthrown.
I ſaw and heard, for ſuch a numerous hoſt
Fled not in Silence through the frighted deep
With ruin upon ruin, rout on rout,
Confuſion worſe confounded; and Heav'n Gates
Pour'd out by Millions her victorious bands
Purſuing. ——

It required great Pregnancy of Invention, and Strength of Expreſſion, to fill this Battel with ſuch Circumſtances as might raiſe and aſtoniſh the Mind of the Reader; and, at the ſame time, an exactneſs of Judgment to avoid every thing that might appear light or trivial. Thoſe, who look into *Homer*, are ſurpriſed to find his Battels ſtill riſing one above another, and improving in Horrour, to the Concluſion of the *Iliad*. *Milton*'s Fight of Angels is wrought up with the ſame Beauty. It is uſhered in with ſuch Signs of Wrath as are terrible to Omnipotence incenſed. The Firſt Encounter is carried on under a Cope of Fire, occaſion'd by the Diſcharge of innumerable burning Darts and Arrows, diſcharged from either Hoſt. The Second Onſet is more terrible, as it is filled with thoſe artificial Terrours which ſeem to make the Victory doubtful, and produce a kind of Conſternation, even in the Good Angels This is followed by the tearing up of Mountains and Promontories; till, in the laſt place, the Meſſiah comes forth in the fulneſs of Majeſty and Terrour. The Pomp of his Appearance, amidſt the Roarings of his Thunders, the Flaſhes of his Lightnings, and the Noiſe of his Chariot Wheels, is deſcribed with the utmoſt Flights of Human Imagination.

There is nothing in the firſt and laſt Days Engagement, which does not appear natural and agreeable enough to the Ideas moſt Readers would conceive of a Fight between two Armies of Angels.

The Second Day's Engagement is apt to ſtartle an Imagination, which has not been raiſed and qualified for ſuch a Deſcription, by the reading of the Ancient Poets, and of *Homer* in particular. It was certainly a very bold Thought in our Author, to aſcribe the firſt uſe of Artillery to the Rebel Angels. But as ſuch a pernicious Invention may be well ſuppoſed to have proceeded from ſuch Authors, ſo it entered very properly into the Thoughts of that Being, who is all along deſcribed as aſpiring to the Majeſty of his Maker. Such Engines were the only Inſtruments he could have made uſe of to imitate thoſe Thunders, that in all Poetry, both Sacred and Prophane, are repreſented as the Arms of the Almighty. The tearing up of the Hills was not altogether ſo daring a Thought as the former. We are, in ſome meaſure, prepared for ſuch an Incident by the Deſcription of the Gyants War, which we meet with among the Ancient Poets. What ſtill made this Circumſtance the more proper for the Poets uſe, in the Opinion of many Learned Men, that the Fable of the Gyants War, which makes ſo great a Noiſe in Antiquity, is an Allegory founded upon this very Tradition of a Fight between the good and bad Angels.

It may, perhaps, be worth while to conſider with what Judgment *Milton*, in this Narration, has avoided every thing that is mean and trivial in the Deſcriptions of the *Latin* and *Greek* Poets; and, at the ſame time, improved every great Hint which he met with in their Works upon this Subject. *Homer* in that Paſſage, which *Longinus* has celebrated for its Sublimeneſs, and which *Virgil* and *Ovid* have copied after him, tells us, that the Gyants threw *Oſſa* upon *Olympus*, and *Pelion* upon *Oſſa*. He adds an Epithete to *Pelion*, (ινοσιφυλλον) which very much ſwells the Idea, by bringing up to the Reader's Imagination all the Woods that grew upon it. There is further a great Beauty in his ſingling out by Name theſe three remarkable Mountains ſo well known to the *Greeks*. This laſt is ſuch a Beauty as the Scene of *Milton*'s War could not poſſibly furniſh him with. *Claudian* in his Fragment upon the Gyants War, has given full Scope to that wildneſs of Imagination which was natural to him. He tells us, that the Gyants tore up whole Iſlands by the Roots, and threw them at the Gods. He deſcribes one of them in particular taking up *Lemnos* in his Arms, and whirling it to the Skies, with all *Vulcan*'s Shop in the midſt of it. Another tears up Mount *Ida*, with the River *Enipeus* which ran down the ſides of it; but the Poet, not content to deſcribe him with this Mountain upon his Shoulders, tells us that the River flowed down his Back, as he held it up in that Poſture. It is viſible to every judicious Reader, that ſuch Ideas favour more of the Burleſque than of the Sublime. They proceed from a Wantonneſs of Imagination, and rather divert the Mind than aſtoniſh it. *Milton* has taken every thing that is Sublime in theſe ſeveral Paſſages, and compoſes out of them the following great Image.

From their Foundations loſſning to and fro
They pluck'd the ſeated Hills with all their load,
Rocks, Waters, Woods, and by the ſhaggy top
Up-lifting bore them in their Hands: ——

We have the full Majeſty of *Homer* in this ſhort Deſcription, improved by the Imagination of *Claudian*, without its Puerilities.

I need not point out the Deſcription of the fallen Angels, ſeeing the Promontories hanging over their Heads in ſuch a dreadful manner, with the other numberleſs Beauties in this

Book

Book, which are so conspicuous, that they cannot escape the Notice of the most ordinary Reader.

There are indeed so many wonderful strokes of Poetry in this Book, and such a variety of Sublime Ideas, that it would have been impossible to have given them a place within the bounds of this Paper. Besides that, I find it in a great measure done to my Hand, at the end of my Lord *Roscommon*'s Essay on Translated Poetry. I shall refer my Reader thither for some of the Master-Strokes in the Sixth Book of *Paradise Lost*, tho' at the same time there are many others which that noble Author has not taken notice of.

Milton, notwithstanding the Sublime Genius he was Master of, has in this Book drawn to his Assistance all the helps he could meet with among the Ancient Poets. The Sword of *Michael*, which makes so great an havock among the bad Angels, was given him, we are told, out of the Armory of God.

——— But the Sword
Of Michael *from the Armory of God*
Was giv'n him temper'd so, that neither keen
Nor solid might resist that edge: it met
The Sword of Satan *with steep force to smite*
Descending, and in half cut sheere,——

This Passage is a Copy of that in *Virgil*, wherein the Poet tells us, that the Sword of *Æneas*, which was given him by a Deity, broke into pieces the Sword of *Turnus*, which came from a Mortal Forge: As the Moral in this place is Divine, so by the way we may observe, that the bestowing on a Man who is favour'd by Heaven such an Allegorical Weapon, is very conformable to the old Eastern way of Thinking. Not only *Homer* has made use of it, but we find the *Jewish* Hero in the Book of *Maccabees*, who had fought the Battels of the chosen People with so much Glory and Success, receiving in his Dream a Sword from the hand of the Prophet *Jeremy*. The following Passage, wherein *Satan* is described as wounded by the Sword of *Michael*, is in imitation of *Homer*.

The griding Sword with discontinuous wound
Pass'd through him, but th' Ethereal substance closed
Not long divisible, and from the gash
A stream of Nectarous humour issuing flow'd
Sanguin, such as celestial Spirits may bleed,
And all his Armour stain'd———

Homer tells us in the same manner, that upon *Diomedes* wounding the Gods, there flow'd from the Wound an *Ichor*, or pure kind of Blood, which was not bred from Mortal Viands; and that tho' the Pain was exquisitely great, the Wound soon closed up and healed in those Beings who are vested with Immortality.

I question not but *Milton* in his Description of his furious *Moloch* flying from the Battel, and bellowing with the Wound he had receiv'd, had his Eye upon *Mars* in the *Iliad*, who upon his being wounded, is represented as retiring out of the Fight, and making an Outcry louder than that of a whole Army when it begins the Charge. *Homer* adds, that the *Greeks* and *Trojans*, who were engaged in a general Battel, were terrified on each side with the bellowing of this wounded Deity. The Reader will easily observe how *Milton* has kept all the horrour of this Image without running into the Ridicule of it.

—— Where the might of Gabriel *fought,*
And with fierce Ensigns pierc'd the deep array
Of Moloc *furious King, who him defy'd,*
And at his Chariot wheels to drag him bound,
Threatn'd, nor from the Holy One of Heav'n
Refrain'd his tongue blasphemous; but anon
Down clov'n to the waste, with shatter'd Arms
And uncouth pain fled bellowing.——

Milton has likewise rais'd his Description in this Book with many Images taken out of the Poetical Parts of Scripture. The Messiah's Chariot, as I have before taken notice, is form'd upon a Vision of *Ezekiel*, who, as *Grotius* observes, has very much in him of *Homer*'s Spirit in the Poetical Parts of his Prophecy.

The following Lines in that glorious Commission which is given the Messiah to extirpate the Host of Rebel Angels, is drawn from a Sublime Passage in the Psalms.

Go then thou mightiest in thy Father's might
Ascend my Chariot, guide the rapid wheels
That shake Heav'ns basis, bring forth all my War
My Bow, my thunder, my almighty arms,
Gird on thy sword on thy puissant thigh.

The Reader will easily discover many other Strokes of the same nature.

There is no question but *Milton* had heated his Imagination with the Fight of the Gods in *Homer*, before he entered upon this Engagement of the Angels. *Homer* sometimes gives us a Scene of Men, Heroes and Gods mingled together in Battel. *Mars* animates the contending Armies, and then lifts up his Voice in such a manner, that it is heard distinctly amidst all the Shouts and Confusion of the Fight. *Jupiter* at the same time Thunders over their Heads; while *Neptune* raises such a Tempest, that the whole Field of Battel, and all the tops of the Mountains shake about them. The Poet tells us, that *Pluto* himself, whose Habitation was in the very Center of the Earth, was so affrighted at the shock that he leapt from his Throne. *Homer* afterwards describes *Vulcan* as pouring down a Storm of Fire upon the River *Xanthus*, and *Minerva* as throwing a Rock at *Mars*; which he tells us, covered seven Acres in his Fall.

As *Homer* has introduced into his Battel of the Gods every thing that is great and terrible in Nature, *Milton* has filled his Fight of Good and Bad Angels with all the like Circumstances of Horrour. The Shout of Armies, the Rattling of Brazen Chariots, the Hurling of Rocks and Mountains, the Earthquakes, the Fire, the Thunder, are all of them employed to lift up the Reader's Imagination, and give him a suitable Idea of so great an Action. With what Art has the Poet represented the whole Body of the Earth trembling even before it was created.

All Heaven resounded, and had Earth been then
All Earth had to its Center shook——

In how sublime and just a manner does he afterwards describe the whole Heaven shaking under the Wheels of the Messiah's Chariot, with that Exception to the Throne of God.

———Under his burning Wheels
The steadfast Empyrean *shook throughout,*
All but the Throne it self of God———

Notwithstanding the Messiah appears cloathed with so much Terrour and Majesty, the Poet has still found means to make his Readers conceive an Idea of him, beyond what he himself was able to describe.

Yet half his strength he put not forth, but checks
His thunder in mid volly, for he meant
Not to destroy, but root them out of Heaven.

In a word, *Milton*'s Genius which was so great in it self and so strengthened by all the helps of Learning, appears in this Book every way Equal to his Subject, which was the most Sublime that could enter into the Thoughts of a Poet. As he knew all the Arts of affecting the Mind, had he not given it certain resting places and Opportunities of recovering it self from time to time: He has with great Address interspersed several Speeches, Reflections, Similitudes, and the like Reliefs to diversifie his Narration, and ease the Attention of his Reader, that he might come fresh to his great Action; and by such a Contrast of Ideas, have a more lively taste of the nobler parts of his Description.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

Never acted but thrice.

By Her Majesty's Company of Comedians,

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane, this present Saturday, the 22d Day of March, will be presented a New Tragedy call'd, The Distrest Mother. By Her Majesty's Command no Persons are to be admitted behind the Scenes.

AT the Queen's Theatre in the Hay-Market, this present Saturday, being the 22d of March, will be presented an Entertainment of Musick which was performed before her Majesty on her Birth-Day. To which will be added, the famous Scene of Thamyris, compos'd by Signor Scarlatti, and Sung by Signor Cavalier Nicolino Grimaldi, for his Benefit. With several Entertainments of Dancing by Mrs. Santlow, and young Mr. Camille, composed by Mr. Isaack. Boxes and Pit to be put together, and no Body to be admitted without Tickets, which will be delivered out at the Theatre, at Mrs. White's Chocolate-house, and at St. James's Coffee-house, at half a Guinea each, the First Gallery 2 s. 6 d. Upper Gallery 1 s. 6 d. To begin exactly at six. By her Majesty's Command no Persons are to be admitted behind the Scenes. And on Tuesday next the 25th Instant, will be perform'd Hydaspes, the Part of Darius to be perform'd by Signor Benedittani Baldasari, newly arriv'd.

On Tuesday will be Publish'd,

Sixteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, upon several Occasions. By William Talbot D. D. Fellow of C. C. C. Oxon, and Rector of Albury near Ripley in Oxfordshire. Printed for Bernard Lintott at the Cross Keys between the two Temple Gates in Fleetstreet. Price 6 s. 6 d.

Lost the 18th Instant, a red Leather Almanack with two Bands, and other Notes, of no Use to any but the Owner. Whoever brings them to the Cross Key in Red Lion street in Holborn, shall have 5 s. Reward.

LONDON: Printed for *Sam. Buckley*, at the *Dolphin* in *Little-Britain*; and Sold by *A. Baldwin* in *Warwick-Lane*; where Advertisements are taken in: as also by *Charles Lillie*, Perfumer, at the Corner of *Beauford-Buildings* in the *Strand*.